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SIPDIS

USAID/DCHA/AA FOR WGARVELINK, LROGERS
DCHA/OFDA FOR GGOTTLIEB, CGOTTSCHALK, KCHANNELL
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SUBJECT: USAID/FFP CONTRIBUTES \$5 MILLION IN FOOD AID TO
FLOOD AFFECTED IN BURUNDI

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Excessive and exceptional heavy rains and floods in November - December 2006 have negatively impacted food and seed production in Burundi. Their impact prolongs the hunger gap period to ten months; the short dry season harvest of December - January never occurred severely limiting the availability of seeds for the February 2007 planting season, which normally produces 50 percent of Burundi's agricultural production. WFP is targeting 2.5 million beneficiaries for food for April - June 2007. This period is critical since the last productive harvest was in June 2006. USAID/FFP has allocated an additional 6,080 MTs of food commodities valued at \$5,016,200 to WFP for the flood-affected victims. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. Regional USAID/East Africa/FFP Officer conducted an assessment of flood affected areas of Burundi from January 25 - 27, 2007. The floods were caused by excessive and exceptional rains in November and December 2006 that have negatively impacted food and seed productions. The entire country has been affected to varying degrees, with the highlands most seriously impacted by erosion and plant crops that were swept away. This area corresponds with the traditional "bread basket" areas of the country. The Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) of January 2007 which was conducted by FAO, WFP and GOB, indicated that 50 percent of the people in those zones have been affected while the six month agricultural season (2006C: June - November 2006) has lost an estimated 50 - 80 percent of its yields. The 2007A five month planting season (September - January) that produces 35 percent of national production was also negatively impacted. The short dry season (December - January) is when crops are dried to produce seeds that are normally produced in planting season A. Since this never occurred due to the rains, seeds will be in short supply for the most significant planting season (Agricultural Season B) of February - May, that normally produces 50 percent of Burundi's annual agricultural production. It is probable that the seeds that are made will likely be eaten during the prolonged hunger period.

[1](#)3. In a regional FEWSNET presentation in Nairobi in

February, 2007, FEWSNET officials reported that the slow warming of the Indian Ocean has created excess moisture generating heavy rains across the southern belt of Africa, which includes Burundi, during October - January. FEWSNET shared that soils that have been subjected to drought over a long period of time become very porous. When it rains, the water runs right off taking the soil and plant life along as well, explaining the devastating erosion that occurred in the highlands. With the exception of the recent flooding, Burundi has been experiencing drought since 2000.

¶4. Burundi has been affected by a series of agricultural and climactic incidences over the past few years, creating a domino effect that consistently weakens future food security prospects for the country. The critical implication of this latest occurrence is not only the immediate impact of reduced food and seed stocks, but also the cumulative aspect of a hunger gap season that has been extended from six intermittent months to 10 consecutive months from September 2006 to June 2007. Cassava Mosaic disease (CMD) attacked fields throughout East and Central Africa, appearing in Burundi in 2004. FAO estimates that CMD has decimated 60% of the cassava plant (a usual hunger gap staple) throughout the country, in many of the same areas affected by the heavy rains and floods.

¶5. There are other indirect yet important implications of the recent heavy rains and floods:

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This event is occurring at a period during which Burundi has ended a 13 year civil war and humanitarian donors and organizations are winding down emergency activities and preparing to leave Burundi, diminishing the capacity to respond to such an emergency.

The food security crisis can be manipulated in Burundi's extremely fragile political environment. This is the third food crisis since the government has come to power in 2005 and falls on the heels of the demobilization of the last armed rebel group (FNL). Government opposition can use this situation to highlight the current government's inability to take care of its people.

If the food insecurity crisis persists, it will likely stop the flow of Burundian refugees from Tanzania where there are still over 150,000 Burundian refugees remaining. A large movement of Burundians to Tanzania is also very possible.

The fragility of coping mechanisms pushes more and more Burundians to the edge. The recent Crop Assessment indicates that the population has resorted to eating one meal/day. WFP reports that parents are now turning up to eat at schools where their children participate in school feeding programs; or leaving children at the offices of the local administration as they can no longer feed them. It is too soon to see the aggregate impact on the nutritional status.

¶6. The FFP Officer accompanied the Provincial Administrator and WFP to visit flood affected zones in Gatumba town in Bujumbura Rural some 18 kms from the capital Bujumbura. In Gatumba, the damage witnessed has been a result of natural as well as man-made events. Gatumba (population: 35,000 people) is in the lowlands. Years of conflicts have forced cattle herders to move their stock to the capital, Bujumbura, for security reasons. As a result communities have installed themselves in areas close to the city, in zones that were prone to flooding. In this particular instance, there was also roadwork being done near the village,

which blocked water run-off (of the mountains) from accessing the lake resulting in intense flooding. The Administrator indicated 17,000 people or 50 percent of the population was affected in this zone.

¶17. The FFP Officer saw houses that were standing in water. All the houses had water marks that ranged from ankle-high to knee-high, indicating the former water levels. There were small boats around and the Administrator indicated it was the only way to move from one area to another. For the houses that were not standing in water, the floors were very wet and muddy, rendering them uninhabitable. Most of the pit latrines had been washed away. The canals dug around the houses were still filled with water as well as raw sewage. The Red Cross has sprayed the area in an effort to avert cholera. The FFP Officer visited a field in a marshland. WFP and the Administrator indicated that a few weeks back the field was entirely immersed in water and the tomatoes and beans planted there were lost.

RESPONSE

¶18. WFP is targeting 2.5 million people with a half ration from April - June 2007. This period is critical since the last productive harvest was in June 2006. WFP indicates the need for 13,000 MTs/month for the three month period, valued at \$12 million. At present they do not have enough food resources to address this need. With current resources they can only reach 300,000 flood

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- affected people/month. In order to do that they will run on minimum reserve and cut current food rations reserved for school feeding, refugees, and Burundians expelled from Tanzania, by 25 percent.

¶19. FAO has targeted 458,100 families for bean seed distribution. They will distribute more maize with a more resistant strain of beans. They will additionally distribute linga-linga seeds, a fast growing green leafy local crop rich in vitamins and iron.

ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED AND RECOMMENDED

¶10. Action: USAID/Food for Peace immediately contributed 6,080 MTs of commodities valued at \$5,016,200, to Burundi to support WFP in building food stocks to address the critical period of April - June, ¶2007. This represents 42 percent of their stated appeal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

¶11. The following recommendations are made to facilitate future tracking of food aid trends and trouble shoot upcoming crises:

WFP must clearly indicate that the targeted distributions are for the flood affected victims (though it is clear that drought and flood - affected are in many instances, one and the same families in this small country). Targeting should be more specific to include the zones most affected in a commune, particularly since the resources for this intervention will be very limited.

Hire a FSN Food Aid Monitor. USAID/Burundi has no human resource capacity to monitor food aid trends. As the country of Burundi transitions, it is evident given

this current crisis that the emergency needs remain high. The food aid situation is currently monitored from a regional level. The placement of an FSN Food Aid Monitor would be a significant support to the expanding USAID Office in terms of monitoring the use of USG food aid resources and ensuring integration with other USG resources. USAID/FFP is committed to facilitate Burundi's transition period. A Food Aid Monitor would support the transition away from emergency food aid to activities that address underlying vulnerabilities. Additionally he/she could work with WFP on continuing challenging points such as targeting and effective use of safety nets in nutrition feeding programs. In the event that FFP expands their partners beyond WFP, the Food Aid Monitor would be integral to working with these potential partners.

Expand FEWSNET to include Burundi. This would assist FFP in tracking important climactic/food security trends as well as ground-truth local reports. Though FEWSNET was called upon in the early alerts of this crisis, they admitted that Burundi's case highlighted the need for better estimates of the location and quantity of presumed erosion on hill-side planting, as well the impacts of submersion and drowning of crops in lowland marshes. Additionally they report that they had very few insights to add to the level of crop damage reported from Burundi due to the lack of a FEWSNET presence in country. If the Rwanda office could be made into a regional office to include Burundi and Eastern Congo, significant coverage of the Great Lakes Region by FEWSNET would be established.

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¶12. Kudos to USAID/Food for Peace Office's immediate and unwavering response which is critical in post-conflict Burundi.

RANNEBERGER